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ABSTRACT

The nation is currently struggling with the question of educating American children for a successful future, but little discussion has examined how to prepare both the educational system and adults within that system to help each student achieve. One such effort, Valuing Diversity in Schools, addresses policy, leadership development, and multicultural education in a restructuring process that focuses on the appreciation of diversity. The Center for Equity and Cultural Diversity at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), has collaborated with several Indiana school districts to develop a restructuring approach that creates supportive structural conditions at the district and community levels. Although implementation differed at each district, some of the first-year results include: a working model for multicultural schools; positive parent-teacher relationships; a strengthened link between schools and religious institutions; staff development programs; and increased interaction among diverse community groups. Using a pluralistic perspective, the Valuing Diversity in Schools model addresses four components of restructuring--student experiences, teachers' professional lives, school governance, and school-community collaboration. The model is based on the belief that democracy must be modeled in the educational system, and includes these program elements: district and school-site teams; trained peer facilitators; a team-member conference; climate surveys and data collection; and action plans. (LMI)

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Valuing Diversity in Schools: A Model for Systemic Restructuring

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Valuing Diversity in Schools: A model for systemic restructuring

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The nation is currently struggling with the question of educating our children for a successful future, but with little discussion of how we prepare both the educational system and the adults within that system to help each student achieve. If we are to prepare students to live, work, and play productively and harmoniously in the next century, we need to develop adult leadership now to provide the teachers and administrators who will have the vision, skills, and commitment to create a new model of education. One such effort, Valuing Diversity in Schools, addresses policy, leadership development, and multicultural education in a restructuring process that seeks to transform our educational system so that it values each student in his or her diversity, builds on the strength of diversity, and fosters an environment of openness to difference. And as we have seen in the recent media stories highlighting the increase in racial hatred among young adults between the ages of 20 and 30, such an intervention is not just a "nice" thing to do, it is critical as a means to help our democracy expand and thrive.

Restructuring for Diversity

The Center for Equity and Cultural Diversity at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), collaborating with several Indiana school districts, has refined an approach to restructuring that involves an entire school district and community in a process that *begins* with diversity and that creates a system to support community empowerment and social change. "What the 'system' can do is create the structural conditions that encourage people to want to change and give them sufficient autonomy to do so, and that provide support and encouragement even when they blunder in the course of creating their interpretation of the 'good school.' But in the end the change must be homegrown" (Wheelock, 1992) Valuing Diversity in Schools works on both the policy and practice level to develop those structural conditions that empower administrators, teachers, parents, and the community to create and sustain constructive responses to current and emerging education concerns.

As a "homegrown" process, Valuing Diversity in Schools does not follow a rigid plan. Although school districts enter the process together, starting with a framework-

setting conference, we recognize that changes in the school culture and involvement of parents and the community, along with innovations in curriculum, instruction, assessment, counseling, and supportive cohesive policies are all necessary to support comprehensive restructuring. However, the pace, order, and scope of changes are not always obvious; they may vary from school to school and district to district. Valuing Diversity begins at different points, engages different players, and reaches different stages within different time periods. It is the exciting variety of this community process that holds out such hope for U.S. society and our educational system. The energy and commitment generated by Valuing Diversity promise to transform not only education but our larger world, and to lay to rest our self-imposed criticism that our schools and students are not "world class." While each moves at its own pace, the schools and districts are demonstrating exciting initial indicators of success. Each success is an example of the important infrastructure changes that will ultimately support a new kind of student-centered education—one in which every student is a winner. For instance, Valuing Diversity's first year of work had the following results:

> Under the leadership of one community's district team, all district schools have incorporated pluralism into each school plan. Each plan includes concrete steps to operationalize the district mission statement on diversity and to develop school-based strategies to create effective multicultural schools. With the start of school in September, all schools in the district will begin to implement multicultural education and will be evaluated according to their own criteria submitted to the state as part of their Performance Based Assessment plans. *A working model for multicultural schools is emerging.*
>
> In another district, one school recruited a reluctant parent to participate on the school's diversity team attending a Valuing Diversity conference. After participating equally with teachers, administrators, and parents from throughout the district in three days of simulations, reflections, and thought-provoking discussions, that parent now is a leading advocate for multicultural gender-fair education, recruiting and energizing other parents. His efforts have significantly increased the active participation of both African American and Euro-American parents in school activities. *A positive relationship between parents and teachers has begun.*
>
> Another school organized a meeting with religious leaders from their students' neighborhoods, the first such effort by any school to reach out and exchange information and concerns. Everyone was thrilled when religious leaders from each church or temple accepted the invitation. This led to a series of ongoing activities and conversations that linked the schools and religious institutions in shared efforts to address the needs of students, both within and beyond the school. *A strong link in building bridges beyond the school was forged, crossing boundaries to unite all available resources in*

an effort to find solutions to inequities in education for poor students and students of color.

One district has developed a three-year staff development plan that will involve every staff person—from superintendent to bus drivers—in an ongoing process of understanding, incorporating, and implementing education that is truly multicultural. This effort builds on initial Valuing Diversity efforts that have led to a school board proclamation supporting Valuing Diversity as the focus for education. The plan was approved unanimously by the school board and will begin implementation in September. *A new vision of school community and staff development is evolving, one that builds on a systemwide restructuring model with diversity at its core.*

In addition, this district brought together over 100 representatives from the community—corporations and businesses, community agencies, churches, local chapter of the NAACP, the school board, administrators, the teachers' union, bus drivers' and custodians' unions, and support staff—for a "Day on Diversity." Community support for Valuing Diversity is now so strong that community members, including the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Jewish Federation have publicly stated their support for the staff development plan while providing organizational support (financial and in-kind) for the effort. Private citizens and local businesses have also begun to spontaneously send contributions to support Valuing Diversity in the district, an amazing show of support in an economically stressed community. *Drawing together all available resources and building on the interconnectedness of the issues affecting young people, the district created its own community-based effort to restructure education to reflect the strength of diversity—an experiment in local leadership and vision that has significant lessons for others.*

The district recently conducted a five-day staff development series that included all of the 3,500 adults working in the system. Organized by feeder districts, each day enabled everyone within individual schools–from bus drivers and custodians to teachers and administrators–to begin the process of exploring what diversity means to the schools and how diversity can be a strength for school restructuring. Additional data was collected from participants that will establish a baseline on attitudes and beliefs that can be used to chart changes over time. *A significant commitment to valuing diversity has been established among the entire adult school community and important initial research steps implemented.*

A Fundamental Redesign of Schools

The United States is in the initial stages of a "fundamental redesign of schools, of approaches to teaching and learning, and of goals for schooling" (Darling-Hammond 1993). But, while hundreds of organizations attempt a range of programs including site-based management, school improvement plans, assessment, parent involvement, curriculum development, teacher collaboration, new student support services, and schools

of choice, most are separate efforts, implemented as additions rather than as integral components in a comprehensive plan. Most of the 110,000 schools in the United States continue to conform to a traditional model (Newmann 1991), one that continues to meet the educational needs of only 15 percent of our student population (Shakeshaft 1986). And, while the work of fundamental systemic change is beginning in a few schools, it has not filtered into the policy process (Darling-Hammond 1993).

Recently, the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools examined data from a variety of studies to discover that when schools do begin restructuring, they tend to make changes in four general areas: (1) student experiences, (2) the professional life of teachers, (3) school governance, and (4) collaboration between schools and community. Unfortunately, in the hundreds of schools studied, most concentrated on the first two components, indicating that many school restructuring efforts are aimed only at student and teacher experiences. This led to a question about whether there are any examples of comprehensive restructuring in the country and a concern about whether districts are in fact willing to implement changes in authority or coordination with external groups and agencies (Prager 1992). In none of the studies mentioned in the center's survey was the issue of diversity considered as a key point to consider.

Valuing Diversity in Schools is a model that both addresses all four components and does so from a perspective of pluralism. We clearly make the link between restructuring and multicultural education, defined by Sleeter, Giroux, and others as education that is truly multicultural and social reconstructionist. Described as "an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process," multicultural education promotes the belief that all students—regardless of race, gender, social status, or culture—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school (Banks 1988; Sleeter and Grant 1989; Sleeter 1991). Equally important to academic skills, education that is truly multicultural and social reconstructionist helps students and their teachers develop a vision of a better society and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to bring about constructive social change and to act on that base. Here again, while some proponents of multicultural education do examine the institutional character of schools as part of the process, most focus on the operations of the individual classroom or school. This often leaves classroom teachers without the systemic or administrative support necessary to sustain classroom innovation and multicultural education. Additionally, with a focus on the classroom, the attendant issues of assessment and grouping, school values and norms, parent involvement, staff development, and other policy concerns are not addressed.

Valuing Diversity: Community Leadership in School Restructuring

The Center for Equity and Cultural Diversity draws on the best of theory and practice in restructuring and multicultural education for its Valuing Diversity model. Valuing Diversity places diversity at the core of restructuring, and involves the community and schools as equal partners to create a positive long-lasting response to what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has described as the challenge facing America in the next century "the shaping, at long last, of a truly common public culture, one responsive to the long-silenced cultures of color" (Greene 1993). Unlike many other restructuring efforts, we work on both the school *and* the district level simultaneously, providing each school with opportunities to create a site-based strategy for a multicultural gender-fair educational pedagogy and helping the district to create policies that support and sustain multicultural education in all aspects of education.

A starting point for our work is the belief that if a democracy that includes all the nation's people is to be fostered, it must be modeled in our educational system. Valuing Diversity intends to help schools become agents of democracy in an increasingly diverse country and to build an effective local leadership to guide this process. Our work places us and the districts with which we collaborate at the center of a national debate about what we can and will become as a nation in the next century. It is through our work in school restructuring that we offer hope and direction to the nation and its children. We are attempting to create what Maxine Greene describes as the space "for expression, for freedom . . . a public space . . . where living persons can come together in speech and action, each one free to articulate a distinctive perspective, all of them granted equal worth. It must be a space of dialogue, a space where a web of relationships can be woven, and where a common world can be brought into being and continually renewed" (Greene 1984).

As noted earlier, schools throughout the country are attempting to create new responses to our changing world. Many of these, such as projects in Cambridge, Milwaukee, and Baltimore, focus on specific school or classroom dynamics or curriculum. Others, such as the statewide mandated initiative in Kentucky or the projects funded by NASDC, including the ATLAS project at EDC, as well as those projects funded by major foundations, are looking at a broader range of issues that include policy. Valuing Diversity remains unique within all this national work because it uses race, class, gender, ability, and ethnicity as the lens through which it analyzes and builds a multilevel system that develops appropriate district responses, links to other

district efforts within a state, and ultimately addresses the development of a cohesive education policy on the state level.

Because change has the greatest impact when it permeates all levels and all content areas, restructuring for diversity looks at the totality of the school environment and how all its components, from the curriculum to teacher-student interactions to district policy and politics, support a vision of individuals, in all their differences living, learning, working, and playing in community. And while there are numerous restructuring projects under way across the country, few have consciously integrated a multicultural community wide perspective into their work. Valuing Diversity both offers the opportunity for locally initiated change and adds to the national knowledge base on multicultural education and restructuring.

Creating a Democratic Culture: A New Perspective on School Change

Our educational system, as a primary carrier of our macroculture—norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors—is key to the development of a productive democratic society. Until fairly recently U.S. education used a white, male, middle-class experience as the normative (Anyon 1979; Grant & Grant 1981; Scott 1981) with an emphasis on the acquisition of skills apart from real-life contexts. Designing education to meet the needs of such a small group of students effectively negates the experience and history of the majority of students, and both prevents students from actively engaging in their own education and limits their ability to be participating citizens in a democracy (Fine 1988; Delpit 1988; Jordan 1988; Beane 1990; Giroux 1983).

Cultures are complex, dynamic social systems that involve both individuals and institutions in a state of constant growth and change. If, within U.S. society, inequality is mediated by the culture, we need to examine more closely how the transmission of culture plays a key role in the creation of a plural democracy. And, while the institutions (such as schools) within a culture help form the individual appropriate for that society, individuals also interact in dialectic fashion with their culture, being formed by and at the same time creating culture. This dialectic interaction is at the core of our process for restructuring for diversity, an ongoing process to co-construct a new social order in which we go beyond tolerance and coexistence to a transformation that engages the richness of our diversity in co-creating new solutions to the problems of life and in co-constructing a truly democratic society. With this focus on understanding the process of culture, Valuing Diversity effectively balances the tension between individual rights and community responsibility, a concern as we move to a new form of cultural inclusion.

In this process we are asking that the nation's definition of democracy be expanded. We are attempting a "redefinition of the normative, we are asking that our social and cultural institutions be redefined. We are asking that our schools and colleges be reconstructed as multiracial, multicultural democracies" (Perry & Fraser 1993). Our work then, is poised at the edge of a new wave of social and cultural transformation, in which education supports a democracy that " is a process of expanding opportunities for all citizens and the ability to control decision making from the bottom up. This requires certain perquisites for a decent life for all within the political society—full employment, decent housing, education, health care, and so forth. The battle for full democracy leads directly and inevitably toward the promise of economic equality" (Marable 1992).

Building on Experience

Valuing Diversity in Schools was originally implemented as part of the Middle Grades Improvement Project (MGIP) efforts to infuse multicultural education into the middle school reform effort under way in Indiana. MGIP, established and funded by the Lilly Endowment, involves 16 school districts in a comprehensive approach to middle school reform. Growing from a series of framework-setting conferences, Valuing Diversity has become the ongoing work of several districts within the state, expanding beyond a focus on middle school reform to comprehensive district wide restructuring. In addition to the work on the local effort, Valuing Diversity has linked schools throughout the state in a growing network of support, reflection, and policy development.

Valuing Diversity incorporates a reflective process that enables participants first to envision a new paradigm for education and then develop strategic plans to support that paradigm shift. Although Valuing Diversity operates on many reinforcing levels and works with many people, the process includes several key elements that must be present, including

- a commitment to equity and diversity and to the success of all students, based on seeing each student both as a unique individual and as a member of a series of important membership groups. For example, seeing the purpose of education, its systems, and curriculum as all designed to meet the needs of the student as the female, middle-class Latina whose family has been here for generations, or as the Euro-American working-class male who has a learning disability, or the African American male who is an honor student from a family facing financial difficulties

- a continued examination of the intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, exceptionality, and sexual orientation and their varied implications for individual students and their education as well as for school governance. For example, this examination includes the disaggregation of data differently—by race, class, and gender—as a public checkpoint for evaluation and analysis by the community

- a multilevel approach that applies central concepts of pluralism and democracy to all aspects of the school community, including policy, culture and the hidden curriculum, learning styles of the schools themselves as well as those of their students, language, community participation and input, counseling, assessment and testing procedures, instructional materials, formal curriculum, teaching styles and strategies, and school staff attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and actions. For example, the curriculum reflects the experiences of all students, assessments and testing are equitable, and the policies of the school or district support diversity

- a commitment to include all members of the school community equitably in a process of participatory democracy and shared decision making. This process requires a social/cultural perspective and a concern with the entire community, seeing the school both as part of the larger community and as a community in itself, each with its own set of cultural patterns. For example, by bringing together the representatives of the various groups from the beginning *as equal partners*, the dialogue develops from a point of trust and mutuality that can lead to the community and school restructuring education together

- a commitment by the school district to engage in this process and to provide resources for its continued evolution. For example, one school board has committed funds and support for a three-year staff development program for all adults in the system

Elements of Valuing Diversity

Critical elements of our approach include the participation of district and school teams in an experiential framework-setting conference, trained peer facilitators who guide both the district and school teams through the process, climate surveys and data collection models

that allow for both self-reflection and solid analysis, action plans that enable teams to build an infrastructure for restructuring, and technical assistance to the individual districts or schools that helps sites maintain and strengthen their work.

District and school-site teams bring together representatives from all sectors to build a sustained effort to examine diversity within restructuring and to develop initiatives that support one another. District teams consist minimally of superintendents and their administrative teams, including the heads of curriculum and instruction, directors of bilingual education, and race and sex equity coordinators. Most recently we have added school board members to these teams. School-site teams include principals, instructional heads, teachers and counselors, parents, support staff, and community representatives.

Peer facilitators can be teachers, parents, support staff, students or administrators. Selected by their teams, facilitators receive initial training in group process, but each then experiences the activities of the framework conference and future training with their teams, and all information is shared with both the facilitators and with all team members. This procedure enables the group to function as a collective and to work out of their shared experiences and models the role of teacher as co-learner rather than repository of knowledge. A critical role of the peer facilitator is to help expand involvement in Valuing Diversity to all members of the school or district.

The *framework conference* brings together all team members for an intensive shared experience that begins with simulation games, such as "Bafa Bafa," that explore cross-culture concepts and experiences and continues through a series of didactic and experiential sessions. The process provides the opportunity for group reflection and learning and builds a shared experiential and knowledge base that forms the basis for ongoing work. Such conferences also provide an opportunity for local members to interact collectively and individually with key thinkers and practitioners in multicultural education and restructuring. Our approach first presents theory, drawn from our own work and from the rich ideas of nationally recognized experts, with a critique from panelists who are community-based practitioners and school personnel. These experts and practitioners also share their insights in a series of "roundtables" with a small group of participants from each of the participating teams; team members in turn take these insights and conversations back to their school or district teams to help build the collective knowledge base. The presenters and other experts continue to serve as advisors and resources to Valuing Diversity and the local sites, sharing their knowledge either through phone conversations, correspondence, or on-site technical assistance.

Climate surveys and data collection offer opportunities to (1) see how the individual school or district is perceived by a variety of constituencies and to engage in self-reflection as a team, (2) gather quantitative information in new and exciting ways, including breaking down student and teacher information by race, gender, ethnicity, and class, and (3) develop new questions about the process and purpose of education that can then guide a strategic planning process.

Action plans concretize the strategic planning process imbedded within Valuing Diversity and both enable the action teams to share their work with others and provide a vision against which their work can be evaluated, strengthened, and sustained.

Valuing Diversity in Schools: Building a National Effort

As a budding development, deeply rooted in the ideas of John Dewey, education for democracy, and social transformation, Valuing Diversity offers significant opportunities to expand the knowledge base around what it really takes to effectively restructure for diversity. This series of activities will enrich our opportunities to learn and make meaning of the links between restructuring and diversity. As an evolving process, Valuing Diversity will open up new insights and clearly advance our understanding of the variables involved in creating education that is based in the principles of democracy, caring, justice, and equality. As this process has evolved within the sites in Indiana, we have collected anecdotal information, baseline data, and materials used. During the next year we will begin a comprehensive evaluation and research component to discover the impact of Valuing Diversity on the lives of the students, teachers, and community and to formalize the lessons this approach holds for restructuring.

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